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My Navy Too

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force to be understood off the battlefield as well as on it.

TIMOTHY J. DEMY

Commander, U.S. Navy, Chaplain Corps

Coye, Beth F. *My Navy Too*. Ashland, Ore.: Cedar Hollow Press, 1997. 415pp. \$16.95

When assessing how the U.S. Navy, or any other branch of the armed services, should respond to changes in society at large, it is important to keep in mind that the U.S. military exists not simply to defend a piece of geography—it also exists to defend a way of life. If defense of the homeland were its sole purpose, its leadership could argue plausibly that it should be composed of single, white, straight, Protestant males. Adding married people, blacks, gays, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, and women to the force certainly makes it more difficult and challenging to develop unit cohesion and maintain readiness, at least in the short run. Yet it cannot be otherwise, because American society, from its inception, has urged its citizens to “be all that they can be.”

In her excellent and timely autobiographical novel *My Navy Too*, Commander Beth Coye, U.S. Navy (Retired), describes how the leading character, Tucker Fairfield, the daughter of an admiral and a Wellesley graduate, deals with the Navy’s prejudices against women and homosexuals as she moves from Office Candidate School at Newport, Rhode Island, in 1960 to her retirement as a commander in 1980. But this novel is more than just a diatribe against “wrong-headed” regulations

and biased male-officer attitudes against women and homosexuals. It relives, through the eyes of Fairfield and her colleagues, the events of the 1960s and 1970s that shaped the contemporary American political system: for example, the assassinations of President John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy, as well as the tragedy of Vietnam. Moreover, it describes how the offspring of an admiral (even a woman) has access to people in the Navy hierarchy that can help smooth over the rough spots in career assignments. Finally, Coye deals realistically with the dilemmas faced by most career military officers as they move up in the ranks—such as the conflict between loyalty to one’s principles and loyalty to “Big Daddy Navy,” and the needs of the Navy versus one’s own personal needs.

Coye tells her story through journal entries, correspondence with her parents, her admiral mentor, her college roommate, her first (and only) male lover, and her female partner. The book was written with the assistance of Vice Admiral Duke Bayne, U.S. Navy (Retired); Navy submarine commander Captain Jim Bush (Retired); his wife, Dr. Patricia Bush; social worker Kitty Clark; and Lieutenant Commander Sandra Snodderly, U.S. Navy (Retired). These five individuals correspond roughly to Fairfield’s pen pals in the book.

This novel is must reading for anyone interested in understanding the struggle that women have had over the last thirty years in attaining some measure of equality in the Navy, as well as the difficulties that patriotic gay men

to serve their country. All of those "wrong-headed" military leaders, bureaucrats, and politicians, who are trying to roll back the gains that women have made and to prevent openly gay men and lesbians from serving their country, would also do well to walk in Tucker Fairfield's shoes. Maybe then they would realize that for women and gays, as for Beth Coye, it is "my [tbeir] navy too."

Reviewer's note: I first met Beth Coye about twenty-five years ago at the Naval

War College. I considered her then, as I do today, one of the finest naval officers I have ever known.

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